

**GRANDVIEW CITY COUNCIL
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES – AMBULANCE SERVICE UTILITY FEE
OCTOBER 6, 2020**

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Gloria Mendoza called the special meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers at City Hall.

Governor Proclamation 20-28.10 continued the prohibition on “in-person” meetings through November 9, 2020. This meeting was available via teleconference.

Present: Mayor Mendoza and Councilmembers David Diaz, Mike Everett, Diana Jennings, Bill Moore, Robert Ozuna, Javier Rodriguez and Joan Souders

Staff present were: City Administrator/Public Works Director Cus Arteaga, City Attorney Quinn Plant, City Treasurer Matt Cordray, Fire Chief Pat Mason and City Clerk Anita Palacios

2. AMBULANCE SERVICE UTILITY FEE

Fire Chief Mason distributed a memo dated October 2, 2020 which read in part:

Goals:

- Provide quality ambulance service to the citizens and visitors of Grandview
- Work towards having the ability to provide that ambulance service through our department
- Make sure the ambulance service is financially sustainable
- Make sure to the extent possible that everything we do in regards to providing ambulance service has a positive impact on all the services the fire department provides including its rating with Washington Surveying & Rating Bureau (WSRB)

City Council Roundtable Question / Long Term Goal - From a human element are the citizens (customers) satisfied? We have not done any type of survey, but I can tell you that we have not received any complaints about how we are currently operating. We often may hear someone make a comment when we arrive, especially outside of normal business hours, about what took us so long – but that question/thought often times goes away fairly quickly once we start helping the person. And it is not hard to understand that when you are at the call and need help it seems like it takes forever for someone to show up.

But that doesn't change the fact that our response times when we are located at the Grandview station are approximately half the time of our response times when we are responding from Sunnyside or home. And given that people would prefer that we show up in about 6 to 7 minutes versus us taking 12 to 14 minutes to get there. One of the best improvements we can make to our system would be to have personnel housed at the Grandview station.

But we were actually put in the position of paying for ambulance service from the other side of the equation – the demand for ambulance services by the citizens has grown tremendously while the ability of the ambulance systems to financially sustain themselves have not kept up. So, we were approached from the ambulance provider to help provide funding to keep the service financially stable so that it could continue to provide the service as needed.

Estimate of Revenues / The number of accounts that these fee numbers are being figured off of is an estimate based off the Sunnyside Utility Fee code and then estimating the numbers off that formula for commercial, government and industrial accounts (I can't figure those numbers out for sure without talking to the people and I don't want to start discussion with the public on this matter unless the council is comfortable with that and they have determined what formula they want to use) – so to determine the number of accounts that we would actually have would require the council coming to a consensus on the formula they would want to use and then actually talking with some businesses, government entities and industries in town.

Estimated number of accounts for this discussion – 3,561

2021 Sunnyside Agreement Costs to Provide 24 Hour Ambulance Service to the City of Grandview

\$187,600 (Round to \$190,000)

- $190,000 * 3,561 = \$53.36$ per year / $\$53.36 * 12 = \4.45 per month
- $\$5.00$ per month = $5.00 * 12 = 60.00$ / $60.00 * 3,561 = \$213,660$
- $\$6.00$ per month = $6.00 * 12 = 72.00$ / $72.00 * 3,561 = \$256,392$
 - Each \$1.00 per account equals \$42,732
- $\$10.00$ per month = $10.00 * 12 = 120.00$ / $120.00 * 3,561 = \$427,320$

Putting an Ambulance Fee in place is something that is done by the Council passing an Ordinance that enacts it. To do that we would need to do a Cost-of-Services Study to determine need and cost. The Cost-of-Services Study is broken into 2 categories.

- Need
 - Why are we enacting an Ambulance Utility Fee?
 - Are we taking this away from a private company?
- Cost
 - Availability costs
 - Demand costs

I currently believe that I could do our Cost-of-Services study in-house but I am also not opposed to having an outside company do it for us if that is what the Mayor, City Council, City Administrator or City Attorney would prefer. I am currently awaiting information back from a company that has done this for the City of Kennewick to get some idea of what it might involve time and money wise.

If I did the study in-house I believe we could base the need on the fact that our ambulance provider came to us and advised us that we were going to need to figure out a way to share in the cost of providing the ambulance service for the citizens of Grandview to keep it available and financially sustainable. I could then indicate the process that we went through to determine the best alternative for providing that service. That it was then determined to put an agreement in place with Sunnyside Fire Dept. to provide 24 hr. ambulance service for the citizens of Grandview. I then could elaborate on our need to establish a funding source that will financially sustain the service for the long term.

As it stands right now almost all of our costs would be on the Availability side of the study because we don't actually do the transporting and billing.

Initially our base cost is the projected 2021 cost of \$187,600 per the agreement in place for 24 Hour a day ambulance service. It could also be projected what the expected inflation will be for the next few years so that could be factored in as well.

The initial ambulance utility fee could be \$5.00 per month and only used to pay for the cost of the agreement with Sunnyside.

- **City Council Roundtable Question / Long Term Goal – Possibly establish an initial monthly fee of \$10 per month with a goal of establishing our own ambulance service in a few years.** The most cost effective way to work towards having our own service eventually, would be to put the pieces in place first that would benefit what we are providing now and help keep our costs down. This would allow us to hire FTE's after everything else is in place. Below is a list of what I would recommend using the additional money (\$10 per month versus \$5) for in the priority that I think they should be done. These steps would help us improve on what we are currently doing now (ambulance in town 24 Hours per day, our personnel at the station for quicker response times, lessen the call out burden on the Volunteers, improve our WSRB score). It would allow us the opportunity to make some of the major purchases in incremental steps instead of all at once, while helping to keep our current costs down (ambulance, major ambulance equipment, secondary ambulance). This allows us to help Sunnyside keep their costs down thus keeping our costs down while at the same time giving us ownership of the equipment. When all of these steps are in place and operating, and the Council is ready, we would then be in a position to be able to hire 6 FTE's to operate our own ambulance service. I believe if we had an active residency program and Volunteer shift program in place then we could get by initially with 6 FTE's instead of 10. Reducing our FTE costs as well.

Ambulance Utility Fee Expenditures:

- Dispatch Fees
- Volunteers / percentage of payroll
- Del / percentage of salary
- Percentage of Operating costs
- Uniform/PPE costs
- Living Quarters
- Residency Program / percentage of payroll
- Volunteer Sleeper Program / percentage of payroll
- Equipment purchases / ambulance, monitor, gurney, CPR compression machine, partner with Sunnyside on a 2nd ambulance
- FTE's / 6 (at time to be decided by Council, an increase in the Ambulance Utility Fee would probably be needed at this time)

The only expense that we currently have that I believe could be attributed to the Demand side of the study would be our EMS Dispatch fees.

Steps to Implementing Ambulance Utility Fee

1. City Council consensus on moving forward with an Ambulance Utility Fee, the goal desired from that Ambulance Utility Fee and the monthly amount they want to initiate it at
2. Costs-of-Services Study

3. Ordinance Approved by City Council to establish Ambulance Utility Fee
4. Establish Chapter for the Grandview Municipal Code detailing the workings of the Ambulance Utility
 - Establish how fee will be applied
 - Establish amount of fee

City Council Roundtable Question / Comparing our own service to contracting with SSFD? Would our own service benefit our fire dept? The best answer I can give you to this question is yes, keeping in mind that the benefit grows based on the steps we take. The citizens of Grandview benefit from having additional trained personnel available at the Grandview fire station.

- Some basic information to lay a foundation for the answer to this question would be;
 - Response time for personnel responding from our station to an emergency call in Grandview would be about 6 – 7 minutes.
 - Response time for personnel responding from home would be about 12 – 14 minutes.
 - A cardiac arrest Patients chances of survival dimmish by the minute.
 - 3 people can do CPR on a Patient if needed, but we should have 6 to 10 people on scene to handle the call in a way that is most effective for the Patient.
 - If your house is on fire and somebody is inside and needs help getting out, L & I requires that we CAN NOT enter the building to try and save you unless we have at least 3 people on scene that can wear an SCBA.
 - If your house is on fire and nobody is inside then L & I requires that we CAN NOT go inside the building to put the fire out unless we have 4 people on scene that can wear an SCBA.
- Currently we can only guarantee that 1 person will show up from the Grandview Fire Dept. when we have a call. Depending upon availability of Volunteers and the other staff member, you may get more or you might not. If needed we have agreements in place to call for resources from other departments when needed, but this adds to the amount of time it takes to get personnel to the scene. Usually a minimum of 15 minutes before any of those resources can get to our scene. Probably 50 to 60% of our calls can be handled by the 1 person from our department and the 2 people from the ambulance.
- Having SSFD ambulance crew at our station part of the day is beneficial to the citizens because it shortens response times, is beneficial on fire calls as well when they are available, will benefit us a little bit in reference to our points deficiency with WSRB.
- Having living quarters at the station would be beneficial. It would allow us to have the ambulance in town 24 hours a day so our response times would be shorter throughout the whole day. It would make the ambulance crew available to help out on fire calls during the entire day. It would give us the ability to allow people from outside the local area to join the department which would increase our Volunteer numbers. It would give us the ability to have a residency and Volunteer sleeper program which would give us the ability to have more adequate numbers of personnel on emergency scenes. Having personnel spending time at the station would make our ability to provide the required training needed more efficient. All these items combined would then be more beneficial to our points deficiency with WSRB.

- Having a residency program as well as a Volunteer sleeper program would help us move toward having our own ambulance program, help shorten response times on all calls, help us to have more personnel on all calls, lessen the burden on the Volunteers in reference to how many times they get toned out, allow us more time to train people, and help us with our points deficiency with WSRB.
- Purchasing our own equipment in incremental steps would be beneficial. It allows us to spread the cost out over time. It allows us to help reduce the costs for SSFD which would then allow them to keep what they need to charge us down. It also provides us with the opportunity to put our own equipment in place so when we are ready to take the step to start our own ambulance service there will be less of an initial start up cost.
- Hiring 6 FTE's when the City Council is ready would be beneficial. This combined with the residency and Volunteer sleeper programs would allow us the ability to start our own ambulance service. Being the most beneficial of all. This would give us the ability to have a minimum 2 to 3 person crew available 24 hours a day. This would be beneficial for the citizens in regards to ambulance needs as well as all other fire department duties. Our personnel would have the opportunity to be better trained. It would give us the ability to have complete control over the personnel versus having to work through another agency to accomplish things. It would further lessen the burden on the Volunteers in regards to how many times they get toned out. It would get us additional benefits in regards to our deficiency points with WSRB.

Could our ambulance be utilized for Inter-Facility Transfers? They certainly could be used in that way, but a couple of things should be considered before doing that. The first is the same issue we saw with Prosser Hospital Ambulance when they were here. The more you use the ambulance for inter-facility transfers then the more they are not available for an emergency call when it happens. One solution to this could be that when we have a 2nd ambulance available to us and enough people available to staff it then they could be utilized leaving the 1st ambulance available for emergency calls only. The second concern would be if you tried to offer this service at a reduced cost. I'm not qualified to answer if that would be considered gifting of funds.

Discussion took place. Further discussion on the implementation of an ambulance service utility fee would take place at the special budget meeting on October 19, 2020 wherein the Fire Department budget would be presented.

3. ADJOURNMENT

The special meeting adjourned at 7:15 p.m.

Mayor Gloria Mendoza

Anita Palacios, City Clerk